**Required policy, market and institutional changes for effective sustainable intensification**

Discussion

It was felt helpful to frame the discussion around two different, though related, questions:

1. What are the required policy, market, and institutional changes that support SI?
2. Should our projects affect policy, market, and institutional changes?

* Who is supposed to do policy dialogue in Africa RISING? Policy making is above us. Though, we can still influence market and institutions (CG centers, international, national, local, NARS,…), providing essential information. Though the question is: are we going to succeed in affecting the policy process?
* A helpful option could be communication pieces, to try to get policy-makers interested in what we do, for example with policy briefs.
* Changes need to come from the bottom, not from the top, otherwise the risk is that they are unsustainable, they do not become the norm. If institutional changes become the norm instead, then people start thinking and acting naturally on them.
* Helpful examples from the SIIL experience are:

1. Bangladesh Agriculture Research Council as the control entity, to which the responsibility was assigned to gather annually all the ag research institutions in the country; 2. Royal University of Agriculture in Cambodia, where institutional capacity to be able to handle the multiple projects was low. Due to SIIL, it has become a center of excellence, signaling a crucial institutional change; 3. ten cohorts of students coming from different disciplines: agronomists, economists, nutritionists, etc. are working on the same experiment but looking at it from different angles. This model seems to have been working pretty well.

* The examples from SIIL are very encouraging. When you start bringing economists then the picture gets bogged down. The experience of SIMLESA was that some micro-econometrics studies of impact have been done, but what about enabling environment, or norms? We need to understand the underlying causes and mechanisms of changes, challenged by economists!
* One example of institutional change is from the AR-Ethiopia project, which set-up a task force that is formulating strategies to refine context-specific fertilizer recommendations given the project is working on fertilizer-related issues and ATA is working on the same topic.
* It is important that these recommendations are recognized by the government and are backed up by strong evidence on nutrition, trade, etc., as well as pros and cons, as we need buy-in from the government otherwise change will not happen. Not more than four pages for policy-makers, and with a crispy message! It was a missed opportunity in SIMLESA, for example in herbicide control, not to have studied the ingredients that would support SI, as the earlier we recognize the issues we need to tackle the better. So, initial engagement for early buy-in is crucial. However, unless there is a process whereby these barriers are broken, it might be difficult to get the message of system research to policy makers. Ex: crop-livestock system in Zimbabwe: research field teams belong to different ministries.
* We need to “sell” multidisciplinary research, which is difficult, almost a mission! This is because a system approach is much more demanding for a researchers and extension staff, who also need to understand how the different elements of the SI interact.
* Another important missing element is the capacity of institutions: they do not necessarily have relevant skilled staff to take innovations on board. We are good at system research and innovations, but institutions should be able to act upon them. There is widespread institutional weakness that we should address.
* Perhaps we should formulate some crucial policy issues to share widely. For example, CAADP should adopt SI as a strategic area. There will be a big meeting end of April but we should get their buy-in before the meeting and for this we need to have the capacity of advocacy, which we currently perhaps do not have.
* In most of the countries we work in there is a strong need of inter-ministerial or intersectoral working groups. This is important for our SI efforts to be successful. Until we achieve this upgrade, it would be difficult to have institutional changes.
* How should incentives be tweaked to invest in NRM? What would be the right incentives for the private sector to support SI? Understanding those incentives is crucial. We need to have “peripheral vision”: while we do our work, we should keep an eye open to opportunities around us.